ROUTING AND RECORD SHEET

SUBJECT: (Optional)

Out of Date Data Bases

FROM:		EXTENSION	NO.
229 South Bldg.	C/ATG/OTS		DATE 7 March 1985

TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)	DATE		OFFICER'S INITIALS	COMMENTS (Number each comment to show from whom to whom. Draw a line across column after each comment.)
	RECEIVED	FORWARDED		
1. Executive Director 7D35 Headquarters				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				
15.				

FORM 610
3-79

7 March 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Executive Director

FROM:

Chief, Applied Technology Group, OTS

SUBJECT: Out of Date Data Bases

1. Oftentimes, people are asked to take actions based on direction
from someone at your level or at the Deputy Director level to correct
some perceived problems. These can take the form of seeing that delin-
quent PARs are completed, contract actions are sped up to make our rate
of expenditure more closely resemble the passing of the fiscal year,
travel accountings be rendered more expeditiously, etc. All of these
exhortations are proper because all of the end objectives are beneficial.

2. The problem arises when individuals are set upon the trail to
remedy the problems. In virtually every case, part of the problem
resides in the data base that is available to the senior management
officer who issued the exhortation. These data bases are flatly out of
date. Probably the most obvious case is that of resources committed in
contract actions. The computer records of our expenditures in OTS for
FY-85 on this date simply do not reflect the work that has been done and
the records will not likely reflect the actual conditions of early March
1985 until at least April 1985. Thus, you have available to you informa-
tion that is charitably misleading and, more malignantly, just plain
wrong.

3. I am in the process of reading Managing by Harold Geneen. I
commend it to your perusal. One of the mechanisms he instituted and
used at ITT for the duration of his tenure there was a weekly financial
report from all divisions and product managers. These reports formed
the basis of decisions and directions for the company as a whole and
gave him the picture of ITT's standing with regard to competitors. But
he insisted that the information be current and thoroughly analyzed
before presentation to senior management for any action or decision. He
worked on the principle of "no surprises" (presumably this means he
never changed diapers) and the currency and accuracy of his reports were
the cornerstones of driving toward that principle. As you read the
book, it will become apparent that his meaning of "no surprises" was
nowhere near "cover your ass." He wanted problems to be identified and
completely explored at all levels of the company without recrimination

SUBJECT: Out of Date Data Bases

to the person bearing the message. Absence of surprises referred to negative events that would arise because of incomplete data, poor analysis, or looking at the situation through rose colored glasses.

4. The Agency is not ITT and should not try to emulate it.
However, the value of current and accurate data for senior managers in the Agency upon which to base their decisions is, in my mind, directly transferable. At present, I don't think you have the ability to get such reporting easily or quickly because our data bases are not suf-ficiently up-to-date. And there seems to be no easy way for anyone to analyze the computer run you just requested to tell you that certain transactions have occurred in the recent past which change the figures you are looking at and therefore the inferences you may be tempted to draw.

25X1

5. I am a novice at understanding the nuances of our contractual and financial data base reporting systems. However, I know that the figures have to be reconciled on a monthly basis to assure accuracy.
The OTS staff officer responsible for this activity cannot recall a month where no reconcilations were needed; and currently, an error of approximately [   ] is being corrected. Until that is properly reflected in the computer, you and other senior managers will have erroneous data from which to work. Such errors in something as aggre-gated as the trend report would be nearly impossible to recognize. The same staff officer reports that the contract data base is one of the good ones. According to her - and I assume her expertise in this area to be beyond mine - one should recoil in horror to try to understand expenditure levels enacted via Form 88S in anything approaching real time.

STAT

6. Similar experiences in putting "delinquent PARs" into the records exist. Often, it is more work to have the existence of a delinquent PAR recognized by the computer than it was to write the document on time in the first place. The same is true of "delinquent accountings for travel advances." Routinely, processing time will create an apparent delinquency where none truly exists. Yet at your level, you will be told (if the spirit moves you to ask) that there are "X" delinquent accountings extant in the Agency.

7. From these experiences at my level, I would be tempted to ask some direct questions:

  ● Do you and your senior manager colleagues feel properly served by the current data sources available to you?

SUBJECT: Out of Date Data Bases

STAT

- When you issue directives based on such data and lengthy explanation of discrepancies are received, do you ask why the data originally given to you was in error?

- Would you believe it possible to demand what [   ] demanded of his people in ITT (periodic timely and accurately analyzed data) to make Agency decisions?

I assert that a negative response to any of the above is inappropriate.

8. Remember that I admit I am a novice in the field of management information systems. But, it seems to me that every new suggestion to improve them has a myriad of reasons why it can't be done - except that it is already being done elsewhere. There are two kinds of people in the world - problem makers and problem solvers. Perhaps an influx of problem solvers is needed to assure you the proper data at your disposal. Problem solvers are not problem "redistributors;" problem solvers are people who render problems moot. A problem "redistributor" is a problem maker in the global perspective. It is not useful to make your data availability more accurate and timely at the expense of creating dozens of other problems in the Agency that are transparent to you. I think we need some problem solvers in this area badly.

STAT